

Br. Francis Thomas, SCJ

1885-1952

Born March 15, 1885, in Hoven, Germany, Br. Francis Thomas was the 12th child in a family of active farmers. For many years, he was another welcome hand on the farm.

In his early twenties, he left the farm after being drafted into the German Army where he served as a bodyguard to Kaiser Wilhelm. Tall, with broad shoulders, his size was enough to scare off most.

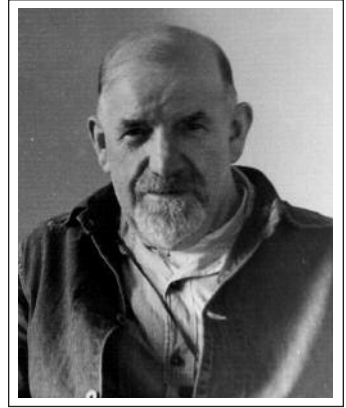
When his term was up, he left the army and entered the novitiate in Luxemburg in 1912. The following year he professed his first vows. Unfortunately, before he could continue with religious life, World War I broke out and Francis was again drafted into the German Army as a machine gunner. When his second term was completed, he returned to the community and took care of the garden in Sittard, Holland. In 1922, he was transferred to Handrup in Germany to assist other brothers in building a new school.

In 1929, volunteers were sought to help establish the new province in the United States. Francis volunteered and arrived in New York on September 2, 1929, with Frs. Kiefer and Hackmann and Brs. Conrad, Mathias and Clemens.

His first six months were spent in Ste. Marie, IL, after which he moved to Sacred Heart Monastery, where he tended to the farm and garden.

Br. Francis fell ill several months before his death. Because of his health, his work was restricted to peeling vegetables and fruit in the kitchen and he once laughingly told one of the sisters helping him, "If I would have known that I was to spend my last days in America peeling apples, I would never have left Europe!"

On Wednesday morning of Holy Week, it was evident that the end was near, so the community gathered around him and began the prayers of the dying. As the last prayer was finished, Br. Francis peacefully died.



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